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Book Review

The Future of Social Work: Seven Pillars of Practice by Brij Mohan. 2018: SAGE Publications, 184 pp. (hardcover), ISBN: 9789352806256.

Professor Brij Mohan, in this stimulating book, discusses the past, present and future of Social Work. There was Social Welfare before Social Work became a modern profession. Ancient India embedded *ashramas* to institutionalize public welfare within a residual SafetyNet. Emperor Ashoka was the first to have provided dignified hospice care in ancient Varanasi. As civilization grew – followed by colonialism, imperialism and militarism— traditional structures fell apart and poverty became the mother of all social problems.

Few people in the West know about Dr. Mohan’s debut as an author of *India’s Social Problems* (1972). He posited “basic social issues” in the context of India’s feudal-colonial context. His prescient vision of an oppression-free society directly and indirectly touched many marginalized populations.

The Future of Social Work involves 7 pillars for a social revolution in India and abroad where Social Work will have become irrelevant and innate. This dialectical formulation is embedded in Dr. Mohan’s philosophy which is an outcome of his upbringing and education in India.

Social Sciences of late have been in news for their mediocrity and shoddy research practices¹. Dr. Mohan has long been a champion to *Legitimize* Social Work as a recognized professional discipline. In the ten chapters that follow, he painstakingly re-emphasizes the validity of issues that warrant a serious consideration. Known as a, “philosopher of practice,” he looks at social phenomena as a mirror of social contradictions and conflicts which are rooted in the history of human-social development. Born, raised, and educated in India, he finds commonalities in the world’s two most important democracies, India and the USA (Mohan,

1996). This Indic-lens has helped him develop a “Comparative-Analytic” method of inquiry and research which authenticates the legitimacy of analyses.

Let this reviewer—before a chapter analysis is offered—present Dr. .Mohan’s critique of the Western Social Work model which emanates from his native cultural-wiring and Western education. Virtually each section/chapter of the book is punctuated by anecdotal, historical, and empirical evidence. A few examples would indicate how deeply the Indian experience is embedded in his critical analyses:

- “Asia indigenous character is essentially heterogenous and conflict ridden...Thousands of years ago, the Vedas were written by in Sanskrit by *rishis* (sages) in the Himalayan hermitages. ... The discovery of Indus Valley civilization--more recently Dwarika—is an evidence of a past laid buried under the unfathomable layers of time” (Mohan, 2018: .20).
- “I have argued elsewhere that Buddha and his teachings represented a protest the Vedic decadence manifested by ritualist violence and unmitigated human sufferings. Since there is neither any God, nor any war in Buddhism, it is reasonable believe that Vedic establishment of Varanasi was threatened by Buddha’s discourses. He had to move to Sarnath to offer his wisdom. There is evidence to connect Buddhist impact on Nietzschean dictum, ‘Gad is dead.’” (Mohan, 2018: 22).
- “Revolt of the *Aam Aadmi* (common man)in Delhi, India shook the foundations of the establishment... Buddha and Gandhi play mascots of nonviolence in which...no one believes...A feudal-colonial drama that spans over ten centuries posit culture that succumbed toto its own follies, frailties, and flaws. Darwin wins. Marx fails. Gandhi becomes a footnote to history” ((Mohan, 2018: 61-62).

These ‘heresies’ call for a social awakening by a pioneer². Since his stance on cultural historiography is “critical,” he minces no words to narrate unvarnished truth, the main function of research. Suffice would be to say that this book adds a new dimension to the Indic-studies.

The chapter analysis that follows concerns mainly the field of Social Work which the author wants to replace by Social Practice. His Sartrean-Gandhian ethics (Mohan, 1992) is clearly manifested throughout the text.

In chapter One, the author contextually addresses poverty, war and welfare. He offers a preliminary critique of the complex nexus of charity and philanthropy and social problems, especially inequality and poverty. In addition, he provides an analytical examination of war and warfare to signify the human frailties and social issues. The author warns that patrimonial capitalism and inequality will continue to coexist so long as the structure of inequality and injustice continues. Chapter Two deals with the world of welfare: emergence of an institution that is in throes of an unmitigated crisis. Social Work as a construct of Welfare cannot escape the consequences of a failed messiah.

In Chapters Four and Five, respectively, *Plateaus and Platitudes of Practice* and *Archaeology of Social Practice* are discussed. Contending that Social Work “is a model based on dated ideologies and incongruent concepts confounding its legitimacy and effectiveness,” he proffers the notion of Social Practice “as a discursive idea of transformative practice that might lead to a post-human condition ” (Mohan, 2018: 39; emphasis original). In sum:

“In a digitally regulated world, I believe, the meanings of both *social* and *work* have changed. This calls for innovative thinking on the cusp of the ‘fourth’ revolution. *The goal of social work should be the end of itself.*” (Mohan, 2018:39; emphasis original).

Transforming Social Work is the burden of Chapter Five followed by Hermeneutics of Help (Six). In a new framework, Mohan signifies the contextuality of three main foci of Social Practice: Mission, Education, and Service. Social Practice signifies a Paradigm Shift as clarified

and specified in his theory of Seven Pillars of Practice (Chapter Seven). In a timely book review *Sustainabilitynext* writes:

“From a scenario of scarcity of funds, a decade ago, philanthropy today is flush with funds thanks to philanthro-capitalists. There’s a real fear that the new generation of billionaires-with-heart may start dictating who and how social work should function especially in developing and poor countries.

“The author has therefore called for a return to the core values and principles of human-centered social practice, against dehumanizing patronizing practice, by going back to the roots. The roots, the author believes is contained in the seven principles he illustrates in the book: mission, education, service, empathetic humility, liberatory assistance, transparent effectiveness and buoyancy”³

A significant plank of his theory of Social Practice is *Environmental Justice* defined in Chapter Eight. The next chapter offers an abbreviated version of Mohan’s opus that lends support to major contribution underlying the dialectic of freedom and oppression. Students and teachers unfamiliar with Brij Mohan’s vast and deep philosophical oeuvre will find this refreshingly inspiring. In a brief Epilogue (Chapter Ten), he concludes: “The rise of inequality and injustice call for new algorithms of social transformation to stave off an unprecedented human crisis” (Mohan, 2018: 139). The author believes Social Work has become a victim of its own success. It is its own nemesis.

Going through this tough minded and provocative book has been an education. This reviewer hopes readers will share this enlightening experience. For a reviewer living in Palestine, reading, understanding and reviewing this book has been uplifting catharsis.

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Endnotes:

¹ See “Hoax science”, *The Economist*, October 6th, 2018: 75; also, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVk9a5Jcd1k>; and <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/72d6/6ef48edb7c03119a42c32c0ab3bf7c5b1021.pdf>

² Dr Mohan was recognized as a “social Work Pioneer” by National Association of social Workers (NASW) in 1995.

³ <http://sustainabilitynext.in/book-review/saving-social-work-from-itself-the-future-of-social-work-seven-pillars-of-practice/>(Retrieved October 11, 2018).

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